Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

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"Government agencies classified as secret a total of 7,107,017 documents. This marks the first time that the total number of reported classification decisions in a year is a palindrome."

— Annual Report to the President by the Information Security Oversight Office, 1991.

Bush in '92, Dole in '96

Is There a Clinton Difference?

It's the summer solstice and liberals are now starting to rally enthusiasm for Clinton in '96, but the raw truth is that the political agendas of the president's Democrats and the Newt-led Republicans overlap to such an extent that in almost all areas of policy-making the differences are imperceptible. As evidence one need look no further than the respective budget balancing targets of the GOP — seven years — and of the White House — ten.

In U.S. politics today, it is increasingly difficult to use the words "left" and "right" as useful terms of description. With Clinton's "centrism" being mostly identical with the blended prescriptions of Gingrich and Bob Dole, even the words "Democrat" and "Republican" have lost much of their descriptive power.

The process of political fusion predated Clinton. But with him it has fiercely accelerated. Entranced by the stirring slogan "Fight the Contract" and by the punchbag possibilities of Gingrich, many people have stopped asking themselves about the responsibility of Clinton and many Democrats for that same Contract.

The president's closest advisor in preparing his new budget plan was Dick Morris, a GOP consultant whose clients last fall included Sen. Trent Lott of Mississippi (Morris told a meeting of Republican senators a few months ago that his latest client "didn't get the name 'Slick Willie' by accident"). After his party's liberal wing expressed outrage at his budget, the president replied smoothly, "I understand the Democratic response."

Even when Clinton differs with the GOP, he's rarely willing to put up a fight. He recently exercised the first veto of his presidency, over a Republican bill to cut $16.4 billion in federal spending. But public action came only after Clinton sought a private deal with Gingrich, promising to sign the bill if the GOP would agree to restore $700 million in education spending. Gingrich turned him down. "Republicans in Congress should be thinking about coming up with proposals which Clinton won't veto," Robert Sherrill, a masterful political reporter, told us. "But they don't worry about that because Clinton doesn't challenge the Republicans enough to put fear in them."

Some eight months ago, in the aftermath of the November '94 election, we mustered some intelligent and heterodox opinions on the likely shape of events to come. We think the time is now ripe for another assessment.

The Economy & Budget

Last January 9, Republican consultant Frank Luntz sent a confidential memorandum to GOP congressional members. The memo warned Republicans that "the crisis mentality that surrounded the deficit issue in late 1992 and early 1993 has somewhat dissipated. It remains an important issue to most Americans but the all-encompassing fear that a majority of voters expressed to pollsters two years ago exists only among one-in-five Americans today."

To help sell a balanced budget to the public, Luntz suggested strategies that Republicans might follow. Since individual programs (student loans) "have friends" but bureaucracies (the Education Department) don't, Luntz counseled GOP officials to focus on axing entire agencies rather than on cutting specific programs, and to "be ready with assurances that any 'truly important' program will be maintained even while entire departments are being eliminated."

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Luntz even recommended useful phrases and emotions that Republicans might deploy: "In a pleading voice, ask: 'Can't we save just three cents out of every dollar Washington spends?' "

Six months after Luntz crafted his memo, Clinton, instead of launching a defense of government, indulged in his own version of state- bashing with his call for a balanced budget. He never came close to meeting his campaign pledges for higher spending for public investment, education and training, infrastructure and basic research. The budget proposal announced in mid-June makes clear that from this point on, spending in those areas will be substantially cut along with traditional social programs. The military budget, of course, has been deemed untouchable.

Jerome Levinson, who was a brilliant staff counsel for the late Frank Church and who now is a professor of U.S. foreign policy at American University, says the fundamental problem with Clinton's budget is that it accepts the premise that government spending is the root of all evil. "He's put the whole debate on their [Republican] terms," Levinson says. "Everything's been reduced to numbers, and how deep to cut."

Just a few months ago, Clinton was insisting that Republican calls for reducing Medicare benefits were a heartless attack on the elderly. He now proposes to cut Medicare spending by $192 billion, amounting, effectively, to the abandonment of health care reform. This move supposedly demonstrates the president's bleeding-heart tendencies since it is $60 billion to $80 billion less than the cuts demanded by the GOP.

Clinton's collapse on Medicare was particularly craven since Republicans, fearful of being portrayed as enemies of the elderly, were already wavering.

Clinton's collapse here was particularly craven since congressional Republicans, fearful of being portrayed as enemies of the elderly and the poor, were already wavering on the issue. The GOP leadership urged that House Republicans conduct Town Meetings over the Memorial Day recess on the need to cut Medicare, a command heeded by less than one-third of GOP members. "What Clinton has done to Medicare is just about as bad as what the Republicans did," Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) told the press. "And now, obviously, the Republicans don't need us because there's no longer a veto threat."

Clinton also promised he would balance the budget without raising taxes. Even George Bush, reversing his famous "No New Taxes" pledge, agreed to a tax on luxury items like yachts. "He should have included some sort of tax on the wealthy if only to preserve the idea that taxing rich people is acceptable policy," says Dean Baker of the Economic Policy Institute. "There was no reason for him to concede on that issue."

Baker says that Clinton, both pre- and post-Republican Congress, never challenged the Wall Street agenda as dictated by Alan Greenspan at the Federal Reserve and advanced by Robert Rubin at Treasury. Greenspan talks incessantly of fighting inflation; the other side of the coin, always left unspoken, is the Fed's battle to keep unemployment from falling too low. "The Fed sees its mission as preventing labor markets from tightening to the point that there's upward pressure on wages," Baker says. The last few years have been marked by low inflation and high corporate profits, he remarks. Nonetheless, real salaries and wages still fell.

Congressional Balance

The combination of a Republican majority, the extremely right-wing '94 class of GOP freshmen, and the fact that the minority has little power in the lower chamber, means that the House is now a rubber stamp for the far right. Expect to see more votes such as that in early June, when GOP ultras pushed through an additional $553 million for the B-2 bomber, more than the Pentagon had requested. No fewer than 70 Democrats joined 149 Republicans in supporting this hand-out (by way of comparison, there are just 46 Democrats in the House Progressive Caucus – and some of them voted for the B-2 funding).

The situation in the Senate is less grim, at least hypothetically. The minority party has far greater influence in the Senate and the more extreme bills floated by the GOP can't simply be rammed through the legislative process. But where Clinton hasn't given a helping hand to the Republican agenda, Democrats in Congress often have. Two noteworthy examples: calls for "product liability reform", which would restrict consumers' ability to sue manufacturers of defective products; and for "securities litigation reform", a Wall Street-backed measure which would make it harder for investors to recover their money when they are defrauded by financial brokers.

Both these measures are included in Gingrich's Contract With America, and both are moving forward with the help of Democrats. The current product liability legislation is a slightly modified version of a bill introduced in the last Congress by Democratic Sen. Jay Rockefeller. Along with Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.), Rockefeller remains as chief sponsor of the new bill (both chambers have passed versions of product liability, which is now headed for conference).

The securities bill, drafted by Courtney Ward, a Senate aide who had already accepted a job offer from J.P Morgan, is also a Democratic creation (industry lobbyists drafted legislation on the Clean

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Water Act and regulatory reform as well). Except for a few minor changes, it is merely a rehash of a measure originally floated by Sen. Christopher Dodd in the last Congress. As the bill now stands, investors will not be able to sue if they are misled by wildly optimistic "forward-looking statements" – corporate predictions of future earnings – even if those statements were made in "bad faith" or with "no reasonable basis [in fact]." Dodd's chief ally in pushing for the bill is the new Senate Banking Committee Chair, Al D'Amato.

Securities litigation passed the House and was expected to be approved by the Senate as we went to press. Opponents suffered a terrible blow when the American Association of Retired People, representing a group which is frequently targeted by financial swindlers, failed to activate its grassroots base against the measure, as part of a secret deal with New Mexico Sen. Pete Domenici. In exchange for its timidity, Domenici, a bill backer, agreed to shield the AARP from attacks by Sen. Alan Simpson (R- Wyo.), who is seeking to weaken the group's non-profit status. Rockefeller and Dodd (new head of the Democratic National Committee), are influential members of their party, and tirelessly lobbied hold-outs on the measures. Dodd recruited liberals such as Patty Murray of Washington and Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois to his cause, while Rockefeller signed up Moseley-Braun, Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

Rockefeller and Dodd are important allies of Clinton, and are strongly pressuring the president to support the bills. Surrender is also being urged on Clinton by White House political advisors. Those staffers – key here is Doug Sosnik, formerly with Dodd's office and now White House director of political affairs – work closely with the DNC. They look at a given issue only in terms of who supports it, who opposes it, and what that means in terms of money.

For Sosnik, the calculation is simple. The party's (increasingly alienated) voting base – labor, minorities, consumers and senior citizens – oppose the Rockefeller and Dodd bills. But the relevant sectors of the party's financial base, whose dollars are needed for the '96 campaign, are strongly in favor. In regard to securities litigation, the relevant players are Wall Street, the high-tech industry – always issuing rosy forecasts because of frequent need for start-up capital – and accountants. On product liability, the major players are insurance companies, chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturers, and the auto industry.

The bottom line is, of course, also decisive in the calculations of Rockefeller and Dodd, most egregiously in the case of the latter. Since 1991, Dodd, chair of the securities subcommittee in the last congress, has received $80,300 from business groups pushing the securities legislation. That was second only to D'Amato, who took in $106,150. "Until you change the campaign finance reform system, you won't change the basic dynamic," says Pamela Gilbert, formerly head of Ralph Nader's Congress Watch and now legislative counsel at the public interest law firm of Malkin & Ross.

The Democratic role in the welfare debate is equally unattractive. Clinton campaigned in 1992 with the slogan "End Welfare As We Know It", thus setting the stage for the Republican response: "End Welfare, Period". All political negotiation since then has been conducted within the terms of Clinton's original welfare-baiting, with its railing about teenage moms making off with billions in taxpayer money and the recommendation to the indigent to get jobs which everybody knows don't exist.

The Daschle-Breaux-Mikulski welfare bill – named after Democratic senators from South Dakota, Louisiana and Maryland, respectively – bears Clinton's strong imprimatur. It would end welfare as an entitlement, turn many programs into block grants to be administered by the states, and set time limits on eligibility. "The structure of welfare under Democrats and Republicans is philosophically identical," Gilbert says.

The Environment

As for the environment, fusion politics has mostly been the order of the day. For an overview of the Clinton record we asked the environmental movement's harshest and most effective foe, Ron Arnold of the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise and a leading spokesman for the Wise Use Movement, for his estimate of Clinton's performance.

Arnold had kind words for Clinton, saying that the Wise Use folk have far more access to his administration than to George Bush's, when only one top aide, David McIntosh – formerly head of Dan Quayle's Council on Competitiveness and now a House member from Indiana – was willing to talk to them.

Arnold also praises Clinton for signing two bills which passed earlier this year. One restricts the federal government from imposing "unfunded mandates" on the states and the second demands a cost-benefit analysis before any new regulatory measures are decreed.

Arnold's newest legislative priority is rolling back the Endangered Species Act (ESA), a step he's confident will be achieved. "I'm very anxious to fight this battle because it's a do or die fight for the mainstream environmental groups," Arnold says. "They'll throw everything they've got into it and we'll see what type

The Rough Beast

The House of Representatives is now thoroughly dominated by GOP ultras, but can still be an amusing place, if only because of the untrammeled, ebullient ferocity of many of its newest members. Helen Chenoweth, representing Idaho's last frontier, is already legendary. Her cry that the only endangered species today is the white, Anglo-Saxon male (actually stolen from Idaho Sen. Larry Craig) echoes in counterpoint to her defense of those who have seen the black helicopters.

Freshmen Rep. Jon Christensen of Nebraska is another turnipsnagger of robust proportions. During a radio interview in his home state, Christensen called for cutting all "hand-outs and subsidies [to] eliminate reliance on government." When the host pointed out that Christensen had outstanding student loans of between $30,000 and $100,000, the latter feebly replied, "Well, I wouldn't have been able to go to school if I didn't have a student loan."

In another impressive display, Christensen once called a press conference to announce his personal deficit reduction plan, which called for cuts in government spending of $1.5 trillion. A reporter informed him that $1.5 trillion *was* the entire year's budget, and Christensen's plan collapsed. ■

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of artillery they have at their command."

The Wise Use Movement's jabs at the mainstream environmental movement sink deeper because of the plumpness of the target. For example, one point of Arnold's attack on the ESA concerns a provision that requires companies seeking to develop land running through the critical habitat of an endangered species to buy equivalent or more acreage – called "mitigation property" – and turn it over to the federal government as sacrosanct preserve.

This might sound perfectly reasonable, but Arnold, justifiably, calls the provision a cash cow for Beltway environmental groups, which have often been tipped off about pending mitigation exchanges by the Fish and Wildlife Service, allowing them to pick up land at a low price, resell it to the corporation and make unseemly profits reminiscent of Hillary Clinton's commodity trades. In one case, The Nature Conservancy bought up a sizeable chunk of mitigation property near Austin, Texas, for roughly eight cents on the dollar and then resold it at market value to the 3-M Corporation.

Incidentally, compensation for the Conservancy's CEO, John Sawhill, tops $200,000 annually. His outfit – stuffed with contributions from hundreds of corporations, including ARCO, Allied-Signal, Exxon, and Boeing – raised more than $100 million in 1993, of which less than one percent went towards grassroots lobbying on environmental issues.

From the point of view of radical environmentalists, the picture is unrelentingly bleak. We reviewed it with the help of Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of *Wild Forest Review*.

With the support of liberal Democrats, Congress attached a rider to the 1995 budget rescission bill, which shields timbers sales held by federal agencies from all existing laws or regulatory review, under the so-called "sufficiency" provision. The rationale for a chainsaw massacre in the ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest is "salvaging", whereby trees deemed to be "fire risks" – i.e., any trees – can be cut down.

The White House received some 30,000 calls and e-mail messages urging veto of any measure which included salvaging or sufficiency. Responding to this pressure, Clinton talked of a veto. But by mid-June as we go to press, Senators Packwood and Hatfield were reassuring the timber industry that Clinton would cave on all fronts and the trees would fall.

Ranching interests were appeased by a Congressional appearance by Jack Ward Thomas, the Forest Service chief, who testified in favor of a Senate rider automatically renewing thousands of grazing permits, regardless of whether the permit holders had been in compliance with the law. Some 80 percent of these permits had previously been up for review and many would probably have been withdrawn.

By almost any objective standard, Sen. Jesse Helms's foreign policy is far superior to that of the nation's present commander-in-chief.

The county supremacists in the West have been claiming that lands held by the Bureau of Land Management belong to the states. Even Ron Arnold of the Wise Use Movement doesn't adopt this stance. But the Clinton administration has lent credence to the supremacist crusade by suggesting that as much as 100 million acres of public lands held by the BLM might be sold off. In prospect here is an immense give-away to mining interests in Nevada and Alaska, and to timber interests – most likely Weyerhaeuser – in Oregon.

The BLM's chief, Mike Dombeck, recently drafted an eyes-only memo for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt advocating outright sale or reversion of such public lands to the states. The Wilderness Society's chief, Jon Roush, issued his usual tigerish challenge to this plan, arguing in a letter to *The Washington Post* that while a total sell-off might be going too far, "a judicious culling" of public lands (such as he recently administered to the old growth Ponderosa forest surrounding his rural Montana abode) might be called for.

The resolute manner in which the Clinton administration has embarked on the gradual destruction of the Endangered Species Act can be gauged by its attempted application of the Hutchinson Bill. Passed by Congress and signed by the president, it places a moratorium on the listing on new endangered species.

The Southwest Center for Biodiversity, a group in Silver City, New Mexico, filed suit against the Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to designate critical habitat protecting the Mexican Spotted Owl, already listed as endangered. The Clinton administration argued in court that the Hutchinson Bill meant it did not have to take such action. The court found for the plaintiffs, but the government is appealing the ruling and the Audubon Society's senior lobbyist, Brock Evans, is remonstrating with the Silver City group for making his life difficult.

On bipartisanship '95-style, we note that Billy Tauzin, a Louisiana House Democrat leads the charge for the takings movement, and South Dakotan Senator (and minority leader) Tom Daschle has been presiding over the last rape of timber off the Black Hills, rich stands of Ponderosa pine properly belonging to the Sioux.

Foreign Policy

Perhaps the man most despised by liberals is Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, chair of the Foreign Relations Committee. Yet by almost any objective standard, Helms's foreign policy is far superior to that of the nation's present commander-in-chief.

While Clinton expands commerce with China despite its wretched human rights record, Helms is Peking's most vigorous critic in Congress. Clinton pushed through NAFTA and GATT at the behest of his corporate backers, while Helms opposed both in the Senate. Clinton has done little to pressure military leaders in Nigeria, a country poised on the brink of Liberia-like collapse, while Helms has sought to cut off aid to the generals. On Bosnia, Clinton has sought to expand U.S. military involvement, while Helms, commenting on a possible deployment of U.S. soldiers, says "Not on my watch" (of course, Helms is a wild man when it comes to Cuba – though Clinton's own position is not much better – and a few other areas, notably Haiti and Angola).

Bizarrely, while Helms attacks the Agency for International Development, promoter of many a coup abroad, liberals have rushed to its defense. An article in the June 26 *Nation* said that AID was "undergoing encouraging reforms"

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under Clinton appointee Brian Atwood. Recruited in support of this thesis was a Republican business executive named George Ferris. Whereas Ferris had previously criticized the agency, he was now respectfully calling it "one of the best-run agencies in government, certainly more efficient than the State Department."

Reformation of AID, and of foreign aid in general, is about as likely as reformation of the CIA. U.S. foreign assistance may have occasionally played a positive role somewhere in the world, but its primary purpose has always been to prop up friendly dictators and comprador elites, who make off with much of the money delivered by AID bureaucrats. Brent Scowcroft, national security adviser under George Bush, recently used the op-ed pages of *The New York Times* to make an impassioned defense of foreign assistance, describing it as a useful tool of "economic or military coercion."

Walker Todd, a former Federal Reserve bank official and now at the Cleveland law firm of Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs, says the left should stop kidding itself about pushing the U.S. government to adopt an "idealistic," foreign policy, a mythical concept which he very properly traces to the era of Woodrow Wilson. "AID is an institution that's dirty up over the eyeballs in CIA-related spookery," he says. "If that's the reality, why would you fight to keep it around?"

He also questions talk of Atwood's benevolent leadership, arguing that even if it were true, Atwood is but a temporary appointee: "It's difficult to mark a sharp defining line between AID's activities and U.S. foreign policy goals of the particular moment. How are liberals going to feel about saving AID and then finding it headed by someone like Scowcroft in the next Republican administration?"

Military Policy

As with the larger issue of balancing the budget, Clinton has no intellectual quarrel with the GOP in regard to military spending, but is only quibbling over numbers. He calls for an additional $1.8 trillion in defense spending over the next decade, the same amount demanded by the GOP-controlled Senate and just $68 billion less than that pushed by Republican ultras in the House.

Clinton's capitulation to the military-industrial complex dates to the early days of his tenure when he endorsed the Bottom-Up Review, conducted by his first defense secretary, Les Aspin. That study concluded that the U.S. must be prepared to fight two major regional conflicts simultaneously, without help from allies, sedulously ignoring the fact that the U.S. has not conducted a major war without allies for over a century, and that it has never confronted two such conflicts at the same time.

But then the Review was not a serious study but simply the latest justification from the Pentagon to maintain defense spending at Cold War levels. Steve Aftergood, an analyst at the Federation of American Scientists, says "Once you've accepted the two-war premise, significant cuts in defense spending become unthinkable."

As we mentioned in our last issue, weapons exports under Clinton have reached unprecedented levels, totalling $38 billion in fiscal '94. The U.S. supplies roughly three-quarters of all weapons purchased by Third World countries, with the vast majority of arms transferred to human rights abusers like Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey.

From Aftergood's perspective, the Republican take-over of Congress only mildly worsened an already poor climate. The needless weapons systems moving forward under the Democratic Congress – the C-17 cargo plane, the F-22 fighter, the Seawolf sub – proceed on their majestic path. The only major program remitted to the drawing board has been a Star Wars-style ballistic missile defense. Asked to point to one area where Clinton has played a positive role and distinguished himself from Republicans, Aftergood replied, after a lengthy pause, "I was moved by the relief effort in Rwanda."

Back to the Future

So what about 1996? Clinton and the Democrats could be confronting a disaster on the scale of the last November's debacle. Republicans, now in ascendancy and still the party with which most CEOs sympathize, will have far greater ability to raise cash than Democrats. And, just as they did in last fall's elections, many people who would normally vote Democratic in '96 may sit out the election if, as seems likely, Clinton is the party's nominee.

A Short History of Clinton Time

"David Bonior confides that a few months ago he asked Clinton to veto a bill that did three things, one of them good, two bad 'It helped out self-employed people by allowing them to take more deductions including on health insurance.' But it also included two very onerous provisions – 'It allowed Rupert Murdoch to get out of his tax bill for selling a TV station.' And it 'also allowed billionaires to avoid the tax process by renouncing their citizenship, something that could cost the Treasury $3.6 billion. The Republicans lumped all the stuff together.'

"Please veto the bill, David Bonior told Clinton. 'All he had to do is veto it and tell them to send the first part, which everybody was pretty much for, back. We had close to 150 members who had signed on to ask him to do this, but he didn't do it.' Bonior sighed." ■

– Jack Lessenberry, *Detroit Metro Times*, May 10-16, 1995

Given the GOP's social agenda, feminists, gays and minorities will probably still turn out for Clinton in fairly high numbers. Support from unions, normally the Democratic party's strongest card, may be more problematic. When Clinton took office, labor was already in dire straits because of the growing mobility of capital and the consolidation of a global labor market which place U.S. workers in direct competition with their poorly paid Third World counterparts. The president's unrestricted support for free trade has made that situation far worse.

Nor has Clinton done much to meet organized labor's domestic agenda. His much touted ban on companies hiring permanent replacements for strikers on federal projects will have no widespread impact. "The return of a Democrat to the White House has not produced any significant gains for working people or for unions," Jerry Tucker, a labor strategist and former United Auto Workers board member, told us. "We've gotten nothing but lip service."

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Jerome Levinson says that Clinton's liberal agenda has now been reduced to his support for affirmative action. "It's the southern strategy brought to the national level," he says. "We need class-based solutions; affirmative action has poor whites fighting with blacks, and conservatives laughing all the way to the bank."

Levinson is hoping that a Democrat to the left of Clinton – he named David Bonior of Michigan and Richard Gephardt of Missouri – challenges the president in the primaries: "We don't have a candidate or a party. Somebody needs to make a run, even if they go down in flames."

Dean Baker stresses that under no circumstance will he vote for Clinton, regardless of who the Republican candidate turns out to be. "I couldn't stomach it," he says. Baker points out that if Bill Clinton had not been elected president in 1992, the country would not currently be saddled with a Gingrich-led Congress. Public anger would have been centered on Bush, whose party would have been the focus of voter anger last fall.

Like the other figures we consulted, Baker was pretty much stumped when we asked him to name an important achievement of the Clinton administration. When pressed, he pointed to the restoration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti. He also said that while Clinton's court appointments had not been stellar, he had not nominated anyone as dreadful as Clarence Thomas.

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Ron Arnold of the Wise Use Movement sheepishly confessed that he voted for Bill Clinton in '92 – and might do so again in '96.

Robert Sherrill is equally scornful of Clinton, but sees him as the only option next year. "The son-of-a-bitch ought to be kicked out of office, but the alternative is so awful," he says. "The Republicans are a demonic party."

Sherrill's also not optimistic about any potential Democratic challenger. "Go through the Senate, go through the House, and go through the Democratic governors. It's hard to see a decent challenger who can make a credible run. We're stuck with Clinton and may as well prepare to hold our nose and vote for him." As to a possible third party effort, Sherrill says organization is the key, and it is lacking: "A few years ago you could still have tried to recruit labor, but labor's dead. What organizations are there that can be lined up [to support a third party campaign]?"

Pamela Gilbert is also prepared to vote for Clinton as a lesser-evil candidate. "I'm a political creature. If the Republicans control the White House and Congress, there's no way that the issues I care about are going to be addressed."

Walker Todd expresses astonishment that many liberals continue to support a Democrat whose domestic economic policy he classifies as being to the right of Presidents Hoover, Eisenhower and Nixon. Back in the fall of 1931, Todd recalls, the economy had sunk in the Great Depression and businesses were laying off workers in droves. Hoover called corporate leaders in for a White House meeting and pushed them to keep workers on the payroll.

The first two years of Clinton's term coincided with a period of economic recovery and record corporate profits – and unprecedented lay-offs of half-a-million workers annually. Clinton not only failed to challenge those lay-offs, but promoted policies – budget cuts, NAFTA, etc. – which will further push businesses to downsize.

Perhaps the most surprising comments about the political situation came from Ron Arnold of Wise Use. He sheepishly confessed that in 1992, he had cast his vote for Clinton. Arnold said that his was largely a protest vote as he was tired of being "back-stabbed" by Bush, who "promised us the moon and we didn't even get sixpence."

But Arnold, perhaps spotting something in the president that was overlooked by his more liberal supporters, also believed that Clinton was flexible, and would give Wise Users a fair hearing despite his having attacked Bush's environmental record during the campaign.

Arnold isn't happy with Clinton's overall performance, but he's not thrilled about his potential challengers either. He dismissed Ross Perot as a fraud, and spoke scornfully of Dole as a creature of the status quo. While Gramm has impressed him with his position on private property rights, Arnold, who says he's a libertarian at heart, worries about the Texas senator's lack of concern about civil liberties. Where's that put him next fall? "I'd rather not vote for Clinton again, but if there's not a better alternative I won't rule it out."

Jeffrey St. Clair says the presidential election is a diversion from where the real political action is happening – at the county commissioner and school board levels, and in the state assemblies.

"More and more, I find myself cheering on the more feral factions in Newt's house in their efforts to deconstruct government central. Any return of political power to the hinterlands at least gives us a fighting chance. At the national level, however, it is undeniable that environmentalists, and most of the rest of us, were far better off under Bush, when gridlock reigned supreme and the lines of demarcation were clearly drawn. There was an energy to the movement that has dissipated now. You can't build an effective opposition with Clinton at the helm, so, why prolong the agony? Sure, I'll endorse a Gramm-Chenoweth ticket – enthusiastically." ■

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